

Heavy-Light Reconnaissance and Counterreconnaissance TTPs

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The reconnaissance versus counterreconnaissance battle is essential to the success of combat operations. It is also one of the toughest missions to control and support.

I participated in a rotation at the National Training Center (NTC) in which a light battalion and a heavy brigade created a reconnaissance battle to fight the security zone. Within the security zone, the reconnaissance battalion fought two separate missions—reconnaissance and counterreconnaissance.

The three line companies were assigned three separate missions—one as a reconnaissance company team, another as a counterreconnaissance company team, and the third to be a reserve company team.

The reconnaissance battalion also had the mechanized scouts under its operational control. The establishment of the reconnaissance battalion placed the unit under a battle rhythm different from that of the brigade, as well as under a task organization different from the one it was used to fighting. The commander tasked with the recon/counterrecon fight must assume an accelerated battle rhythm, different from that of the main battle maneuver force, and plan and train accordingly.

There were two basic schools of thought regarding the role of the light infantry in a mechanized environment. One contended that the role should be a supporting mission. This meant that a battalion of light infantry would support a mechanized infantry attack by seizing key terrain, providing local security for the mechanized forces, or closing a flank in the defense.

The second school of thought con-

tended that even though these missions were important, they were not as important as executing the first mission in a battle—the recon/counterrecon force. Looking at numerous studies at the NTC and the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC), we found that the unit that wins the reconnaissance fight usually wins the battle. This is not hard to understand, considering that having the correct information about the enemy helps commanders make informed decisions.

The second school of thought led to the idea that a light infantry recon battalion should be established to fight the

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security zone in a mechanized environment. Using its current doctrine, the light infantry battalion began to train on conducting movements to contact using the search and attack technique, which provides all the requirements for fighting and winning in a security area. The companies did not issue mission statements using the term *search and attack* but instead focused their platoons on specific missions.

For example, the recon company team task organized to conduct a zone or area reconnaissance of special named areas of interests (NAIs). This allowed

the battalion to have *finders* in front of the counterrecon element. The counterrecon company then established such missions as antiarmor ambushes, reconnaissance, or block, deny, and attack missions. With *finders*, *fixers*, and *finishers*, the battalion could call the operation in the security area a *movement to contact* using the *search and attack* technique.

Some tacticians may not be convinced that what I have described is, by definition, a movement to contact using the search and attack technique. I would describe it as a textbook definition, but according to FM 7-20, a search and attack "is a decentralized movement to contact, requiring multiple, coordinated patrols to locate the enemy." The purpose of the search and attack is to focus the units' effort on the destruction of the enemy, area denial, force protection, and information collection.

Task Organization

The following requirements were identified as necessary to the accomplishment of a continuous recon/counterrecon mission and were the basis for the establishment of the task organization of the recon battalion:

- The entire brigade's heavy/light scouts would be controlled by one battalion commander. This unity of command would permit the commander to task organize the reconnaissance elements with heavy scouts and give the reconnaissance company team sole command of these elements. This would enable the reconnaissance battalion to communicate with one recon headquarters instead of several.

- The designation of a company team

reserve would allow continuous operations throughout the campaign.

- A reserve would be maintained to reestablish a security zone as soon as a battle ends. The task organization of this reserve must be constant to allow an easy transition into follow-on missions.

- A play book must be published to standardize procedures and help alleviate some of the pressure caused by the accelerated battle rhythm. The light battalion must likewise be self-sustaining during movement into sector and must be able to protect itself as it enters the sector.

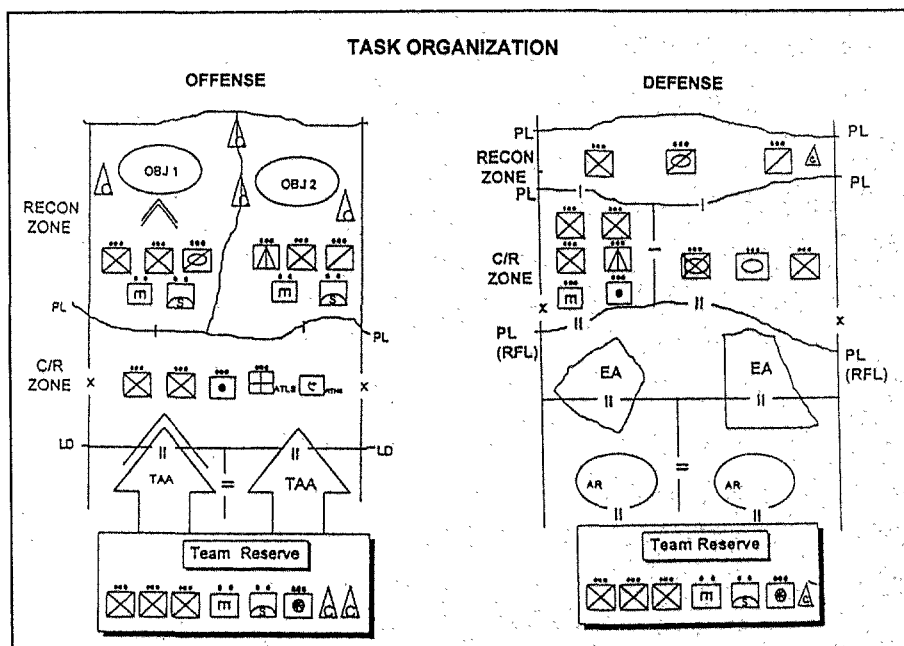
- The units must be efficient in battle drills and must understand their engagement criteria.

Reconnaissance Company Team

The primary mission of the reconnaissance company is to find, report, and conduct a battle handoff of all enemy units to the counterrecon zone units. By definition, the reconnaissance in force is a limited-objective operation to obtain information and locate and test enemy operations and report all activity to higher.

The following are some considerations for planning the reconnaissance fight:

- Establish a reconnaissance and security (R&S) plan early enough to disseminate it to all soldiers.
- Do not overload the recon element with NAIs. Choose areas that are likely to be used chiefly by the enemy. Develop a separate casualty evacuation plan for the recon elements.
- Develop a separate combat service support plan, aside from the main battle plan.
- Replace lost observers.
- Provide air cover and a fire support plan.
- Use force protection when inserting recon forces.
- Take calculated risks when moving units into position.
- Allow recon elements to be aggressive, so long as they do not compromise the overall mission.
- Establish a recon standing operating procedure for reporting.
- Ensure reliable communications



with reconnaissance elements.

- In the desert environment, plan on covering six to 11 kilometers in depth forward of the counterreconnaissance.
- Designate no fire areas for all recon positions.
- Establish near and far recognition signs to prevent fratricide.
- Ensure that both reconnaissance and counterreconnaissance elements have a plan to conduct a battle handoff of enemy locations.
- Establish a different battle rhythm in the battalion to fight the fight.
- Know Battle Drills 2, 3, 4, 10, 11, 12 thoroughly (React to Contact, Break Contact, React to Ambush—both dismounted and mounted).
- Develop a battle drill for reacting to armor while dismounted.

Counterreconnaissance Team

The first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word *counterreconnaissance* is *deny*, or *destroy*, enemy forces. The next thing that comes to mind is, "We are in the defense." But I would venture to say that the counterrecon in a heavy/light environment can use light forces as a counterreconnaissance force in the offense as well as the defense. It is clear from the study of history that the first step before battle is the collection of information about the enemy, followed by the destruction of enemy intelligence gathering devices, and then the destruction of the enemy

himself. If you accept that as truth, then why not maintain a counterrecon force in both the offense and the defense?

The following are some considerations for fighting the counterrecon missions in a heavy/light environment:

- Maintain unity of command within a company.
- Ensure that you maintain mobility in the counterrecon zone (horse blanket technique).
- When the unit is in the offense, be able to bolster recon forces rapidly where needed. Replace lost observers.
- Give your platoons specific missions—*ambush*, *deny*, for example.
- Make sure you can relay information from the recon zone if necessary.
- Have a plan for vehicle and dismounted identification.

Communication

At the NTC, my unit realized that flooding the recon zone with observers resulted in an increase in reporting, as well as for overlapping reporting. This also had its disadvantages because of the CSS operations needed to support such a large number of recon forces. A unit could have as many as 30 teams in position. The recon battalion commander must rely on the companies to properly screen his company teams' reports in order to be effective.

For example, the recon team in a light battalion must report to the squad leader, then the platoon leader, and then

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the company. The recon platoons from the heavy and light unit reports to the company commander in charge of the recon zone. In order for the information flow to work, the issues of communication support and retransmission have to be organized before planning this operation. A unit can only field the number of teams with which it can communicate.

On the basis of the lessons learned at the NTC, I am sure a light infantry battalion can do more than anyone previously thought possible. The key to this technique is for the light unit to fight at least one major training exercise with a heavy unit, and for both units to understand their limitations as well as their advantages. This will allow both types of units to be more productive in exe-

cuting the reconnaissance and counter-reconnaissance mission.

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